

HAWORTH

Stress and Resilience in the Global Workplace

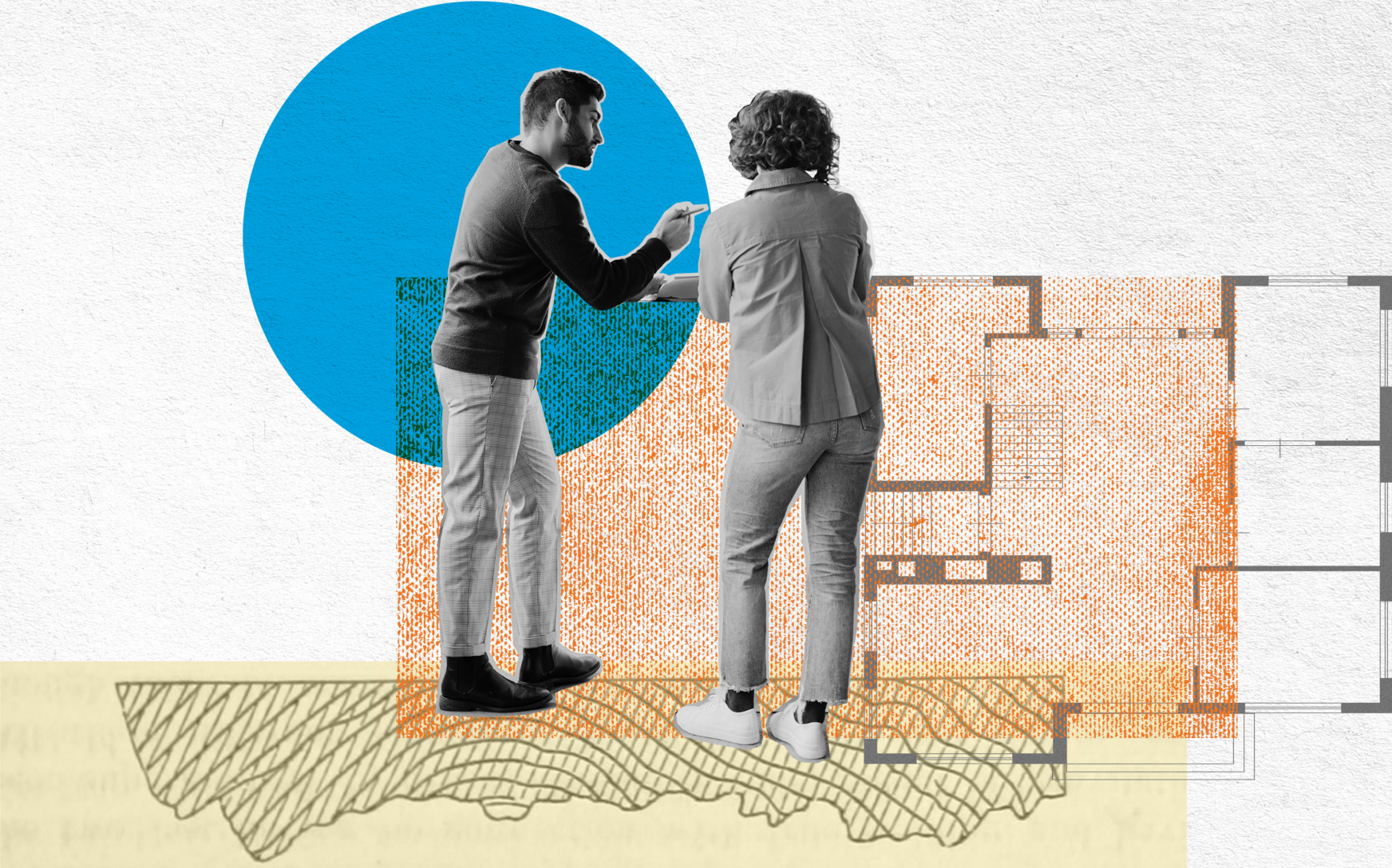




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Stress



Stress in a New Era

Stress is nothing new, and most of us have experienced it in some form. Stress and mental health issues are on the rise, and the effects are felt rippling through our lives at home and at work—impacting our well-being, relationships, job satisfaction, and performance.

US businesses lose over

\$320 billion yearly

due to workplace stress*

»» *Employers who understand stress and can authentically address employees' emotional and physical well-being will build a more resilient workforce—and have an easier time attracting and retaining the best, most talented people.*



* Source: Gallup, 2023

Stress 101

Stress is a physical, emotional, or psychological strain that occurs when situations demand more effort and attention than a person has to give.

Stress and the things that cause it (stressors) threaten a person's sense of well-being—physically, emotionally, or both.

Stressors can include:

- Adverse Events
- Physical Environment
- Job Demands
- Change
- Social Issues
- Technology Challenges

How We Handle Stress

There are three basic steps to the process of dealing with stress:

1

Perceiving the “threat”

The point at which we are introduced to a stressful situation and its related stressors, recognizing them as such

2

Assessing the situation

Determining the extent of the threat and what resources we have or don't have to overcome it

3

Coping and adapting

Putting available resources to use to withstand or overcome the situation

People are constantly coping and adapting to new situations. In many cases, we hardly notice these adaptations, but the body is thought to have limited resources to help us cope and adapt to stressors.

»» *In cases where stress is more than people can handle internally, they will need external resources to help them cope, adapt, and overcome the situation.*



Job-Related Stress

While stressors can come from a variety of sources, job stress is responsible for more health complaints than financial or family problems. In fact, a survey found that the most stressful time of day for all generations is from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., the most common working hours.



94% of Americans

experience stress in the workplace*

Stress from job demands is a major source of employee disengagement. What employers expect of their employees (their job demands) can either be constructive or destructive to performance.

Constructive Job Demands

- Perceived as positive motivators for work responsibilities
- Drive high performance
- Workers feel challenged, but not overwhelmed
- Completion of tasks provides a sense of accomplishment and desire to move forward

Destructive Job Demands

- Perceived as hindrances or obstacles to meeting responsibilities
- Proliferate a feeling that no matter how much effort is given, the output is failure
- Workers are overwhelmed by responsibilities, as if they're constantly "spinning their wheels"
- Tasks may not be finished or are completed at a minimal level of performance

* Source: American Institute of Stress, 2023



»» **Job demands can be stressors. Supporting employees with leadership and resources that ensure job demands are constructive helps reduce stress and improve performance.**

Chronic Stress & Burnout at Work

Stress may be the root cause and the strongest enemy of well-being—even for people who appear to “step up” to challenges and maintain normal performance levels. In cases where exposure to stressors is continuous or repetitive, performance will wane over time and often continue to suffer—even after stressors have been removed. The result of this chronic stress is “burnout.”

Left to fester unaddressed, chronic stress can contribute to more issues—aside from performance—that act as additional stressors to individuals, teams, and the entire organization.

- Concentration & Memory Issues
- Emotional Exhaustion
- Cardiovascular Disease
- Mental Illness
- Healthcare Costs
- Financial Strain from Missed Wages
- Absenteeism



30% of American employees

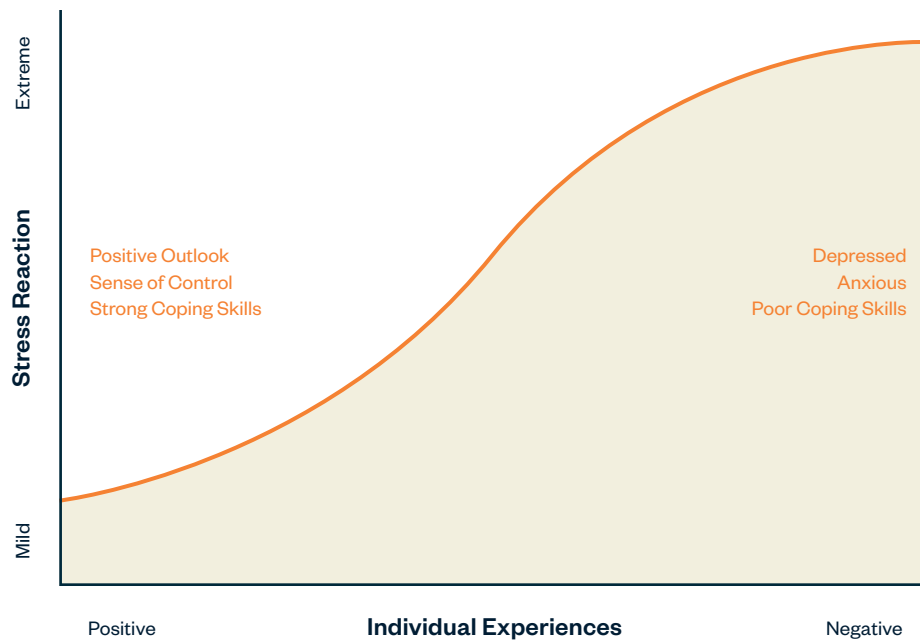
experienced frequent or constant burnout over the last year*

* Source: Gallup, 2022



Why People Respond Differently to Stress

Stress reactions occur on a continuum, ranging from mild to extreme. It all depends on the individual and their own experiences. A person's personality, internal sensibilities, state of mind, and coping style all affect their response to a stressor. For example, an individual with a positive outlook and an internal sense of control may feel that same positivity and sense of control over a stressor. On the other hand, someone who is depressed and anxious may experience negative emotions and become more easily affected by stressors.¹



»» *While some people may seem better equipped to deal with stress and maintain normal performance, they will eventually experience the effects of long-term stress, or burnout. Employees who have resiliency resources available to them are less likely to experience chronic stress and burnout.*

Absenteeism costs businesses



**\$1,685/employee
per year in the US***



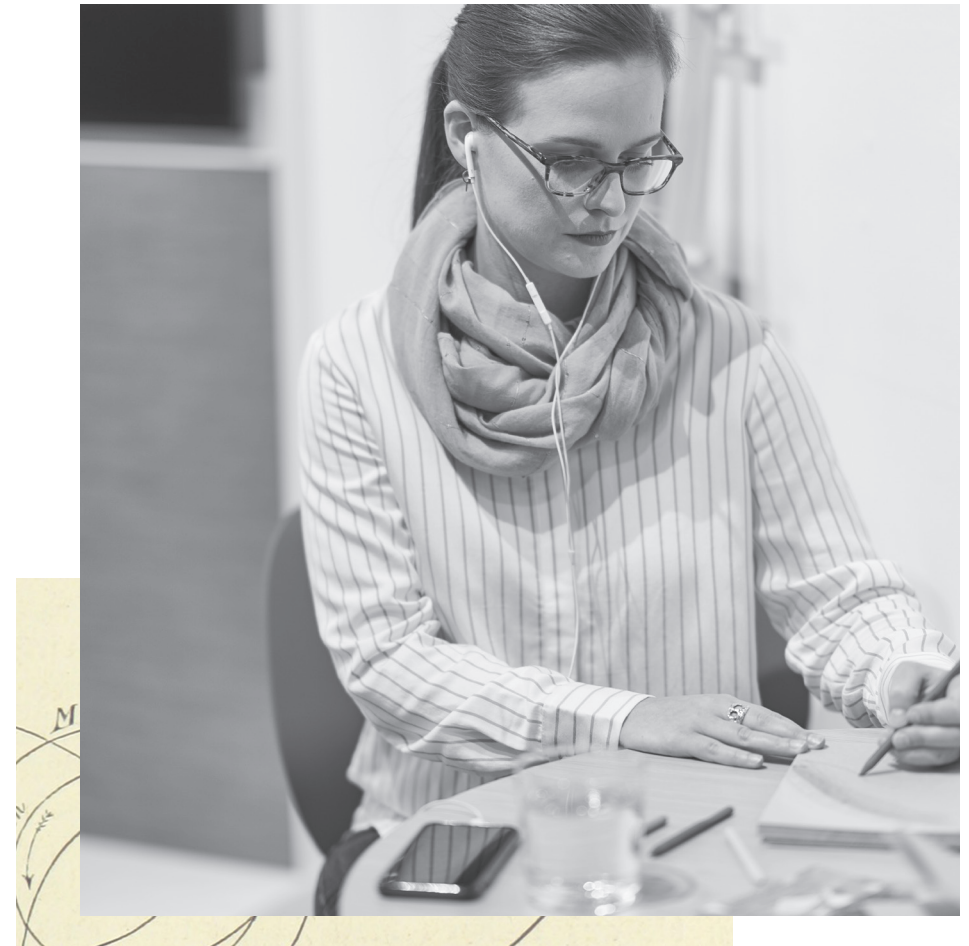
* Source: CDC, 2015, ¹ Gates, 2001

Equity Considerations Go a Long Way

Sensory processing sensitivity (SPS) is a personality trait that refers to a person's tendency to process stimuli and information on a more intense level than others.

A main reason people respond differently to stress is due to SPS. Inclined to be more creative and empathetic, people with SPS are often innovative, high performers and make excellent managers. However, SPS can put an individual at greater risk for chronic stress and burnout, as they feel any lack or loss of supportive resources more acutely than other members of the workforce.

SPS is also associated with a wide range of cognitive conditions, including ADHD, anxiety, autism, and PTSD. Often unreported—or even undiagnosed—these conditions do not need to be a limitation to performance when attention is given to helping people manage SPS at work.



30% of people

have a high level of sensory processing sensitivity*

* Source: Lionetti, et al., 2018

- »» *Since a diverse workforce experiences stress in different ways, an open line of communication between leadership and each employee is important in determining what individuals need to perform well. Workplace design and organizational culture should respond accordingly and provide additional resources to support resilience to stress, particularly for individuals with SPS.*

Resilience & Resources



Resilience, Resources, & Stress

Resilience is the capability of someone or something to recover, or “bounce back,” from applied stress utilizing internal and/or external resources.

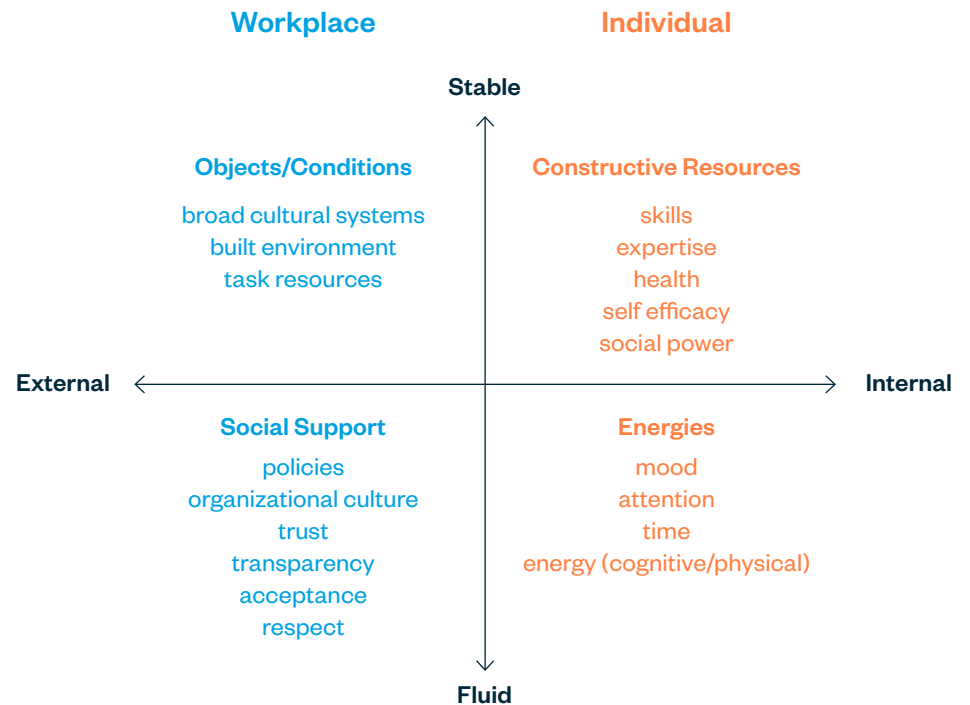
The relationship between resources and stress is based on individual perception. How a person perceives the resources they have—or don’t have—at their disposal impacts their stress level, as well as their response and resilience to adverse conditions. These resources can include objects and conditions in the workplace, social support from the organization, as well as an individual’s own internal constructive resources and energies. Additionally, some resources are more stable, while others are more fluid—more easily changed and influenced.

Resources Are a Two-Way Street

People use resources to help them deal directly with stressors and as a means of obtaining additional resources. They invest their individual resources into their work, in terms of time, skills, etc. In turn, they expect to gain additional resources that help them meet work responsibilities and goals, such as a supportive workplace environment, task resources, culture, policies, and trust.

»» *Organizations have the power to greatly impact resilience to stress because they control the availability of external workplace resources, which include objects and conditions, as well as social support. Employees not only apply these resources directly to their job, but also to building and preserving their internal individual resources.*

Resource Categorization



When Resources Are Lost or Lacking

Stress occurs when people feel they don't have the resources needed to overcome incoming stressors and challenges. That said, there are three specific situations related to resources that cause stress:

- When resources are lost
- When resources are threatened with loss
- When there is a failure to gain resources after significant effort is invested

Source: Hobfoll et al., 2018

This shows us that people are motivated to protect their resources—in order to avoid stress. So, when the demands of a job exceed an employee's available resources, those job demands become destructive to their well-being and performance. The individual becomes stressed and less resilient to adverse conditions.



63% of US workers

are ready to quit their jobs due to stress. 16% of workers have already quit a past job due to stress.*

* Source: Zippia, 2023

»» *Over time, people who feel their resources are lacking or being lost are extremely susceptible to burnout—a leading reason talented employees leave an organization.*

Real-World Examples

Resource Loss

Coworkers are one of our greatest resources on the job. What happens when one of those social support resources leaves the organization? Job demands on other employees increase to fill the gap. Stress among the workforce increases because that resource (the departing employee) has been lost. In terms of objects and conditions, a new or rearranged office space could also cause the perception of resource loss if an employee's workspace now lacks certain features and tools they had before (e.g., natural light or their desk is smaller). If the situation continues without being addressed in either of these examples, the associated chronic stress can easily lead to burnout.

Resources Threatened

Resource threats are based on potential resource loss. If the economy is unstable, for example, employees may be continually worried that they may lose their jobs. This situation also causes stress, which can become chronic if that uncertainty and fear of loss are constant.

No Resource Gain

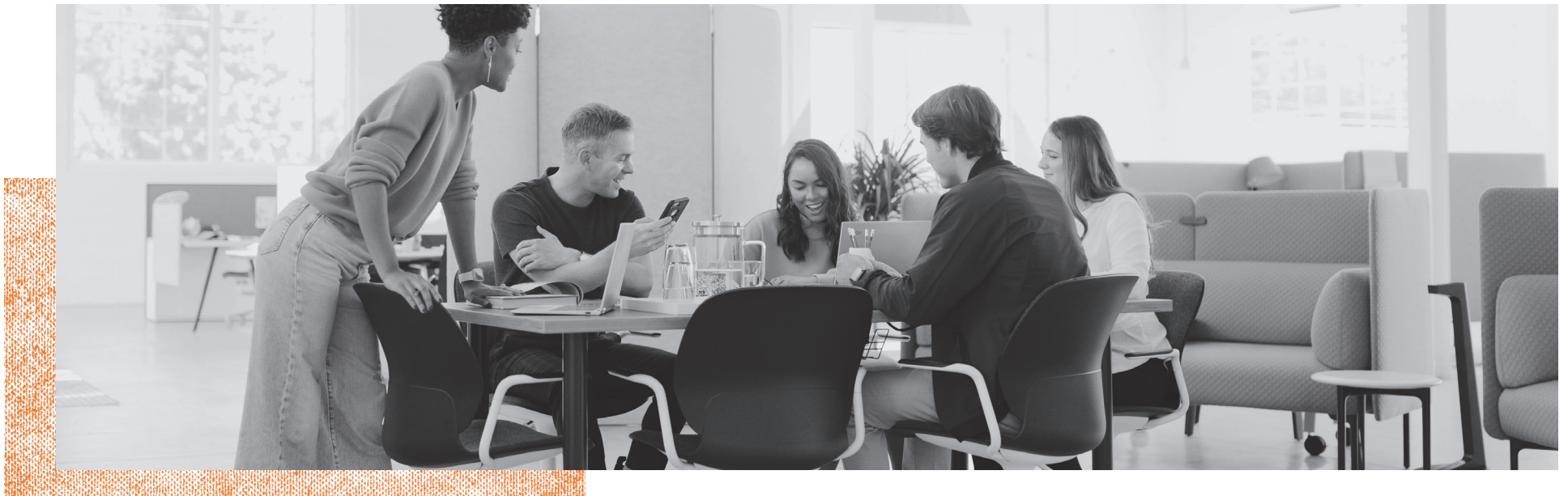
The resources we currently have can be used to gain additional resources. Let's say an employee puts in extra time and effort (both individual resources) into delivering high-quality results that benefit the organization, but is denied a well-earned raise. They've invested significant personal resources but have seen no resource gain. Over time, this high-performing employee will become discouraged and their motivation to invest more of their personal resources will be lowered.

Social Support Resources

People come to work to feel a sense of belonging and connection, and to feel like they are part of something greater than themselves. Social support from others can contribute to an employee's overall well-being and help them preserve their resources or gain additional ones—both in the workplace and within themselves. An organizational culture and policies that empower individuals—giving them freedom and autonomy to work in a manner and/or location that allows them to perform their best—provides people with resource gains, especially via trust and respect.

When employees sense a disconnect between what an organization says and what that organization does, they lose trust and are more likely to disengage, ignore company policies, or even quit. In such cases, people feel that they must preserve their resources because no amount of effort or time will result in resource gains.

»» *Bolstering social support resources through culture, policy, and transparency, helps people stay engaged with the organization, their work, and their coworkers—no matter where they're working—resulting in the success and well-being of both the individual and the organization.*



Objects & Conditions for Resilience

Our research found that organizations can make the largest impact on stress and resilience in six workplace design resource categories.



User Control

Adjustable surfaces, chairs, task lighting, vertical screens, speech privacy



Accessibility of Coworkers

Proximity to coworkers for knowledge sharing and collaboration



Tools & Tech

Task-specific tools and collaborative technology



Space Variety

Workpoint choice, access to restorative, social, and collaborative spaces



Ambient Qualities

Air quality, access to daylight, nature and natural elements, thermal comfort, freedom from noise



Legibility*

Intuitive workspaces and tools, sight lines to coworkers, architectural differentiation for navigation and wayfinding

**not applicable to off-site work*

»» *Adapting spaces as well as policies, procedures, and norms to employees' best interests for resilience is ultimately in the best interest of the organization as well.*

Resources Across the Globe

Regions across the globe value different resources due to differences in social norms, values, responses to societal events, typical workplace cultures, and attitudes towards remote and hybrid work.

On-Site Findings

North America

Legibility is most influential and accounts for **11%** of performance

Europe

User Control and **Legibility** are most influential and account for **21%** of performance

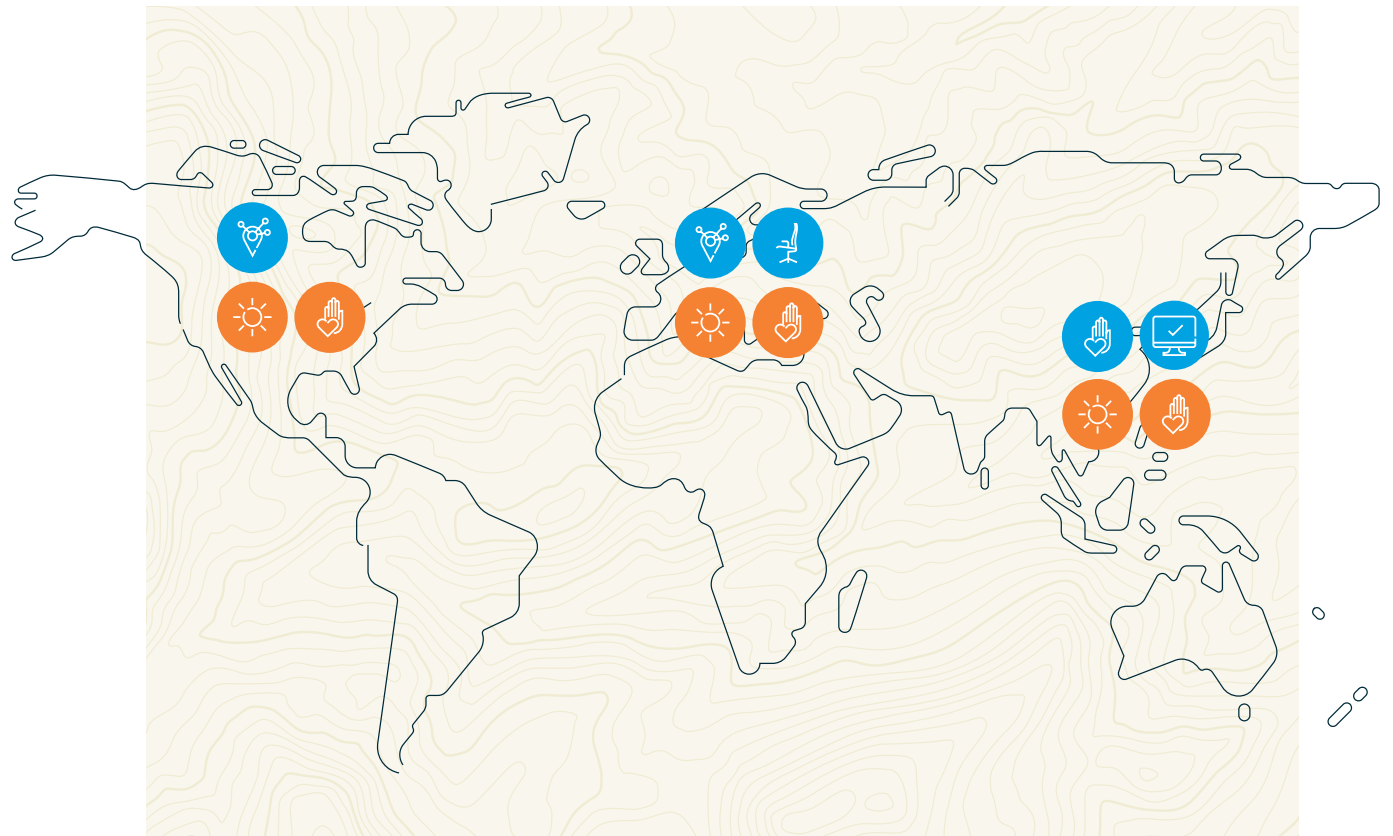
Asia-Pacific

Tools & Technology and **Culture** are most influential and account for **22%** of performance

Remote Findings

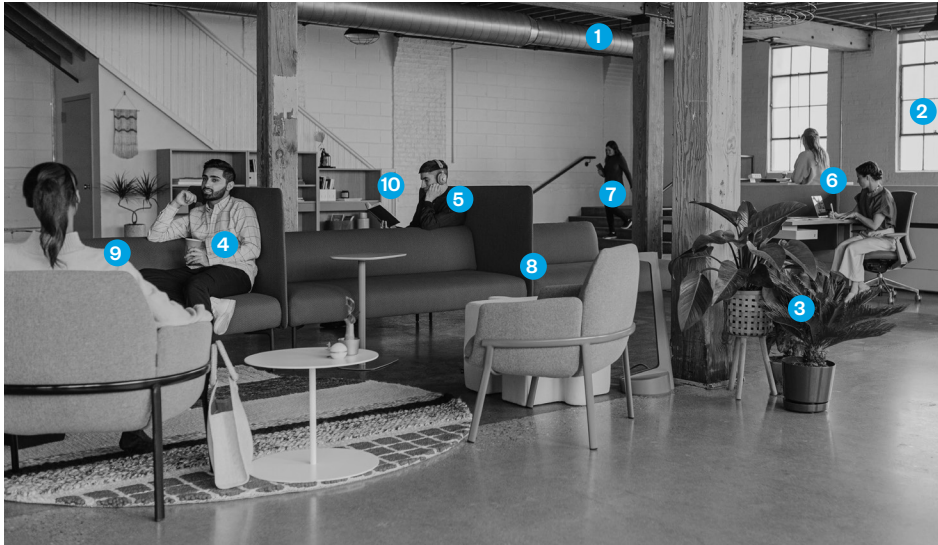
Feeling supported by one's **Team Culture** and having good **Ambient Qualities** are both important to support remote performance across all three regions.

Similar to on-site settings, EU favored space-related resources when working remotely.

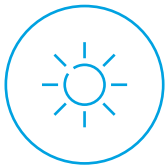
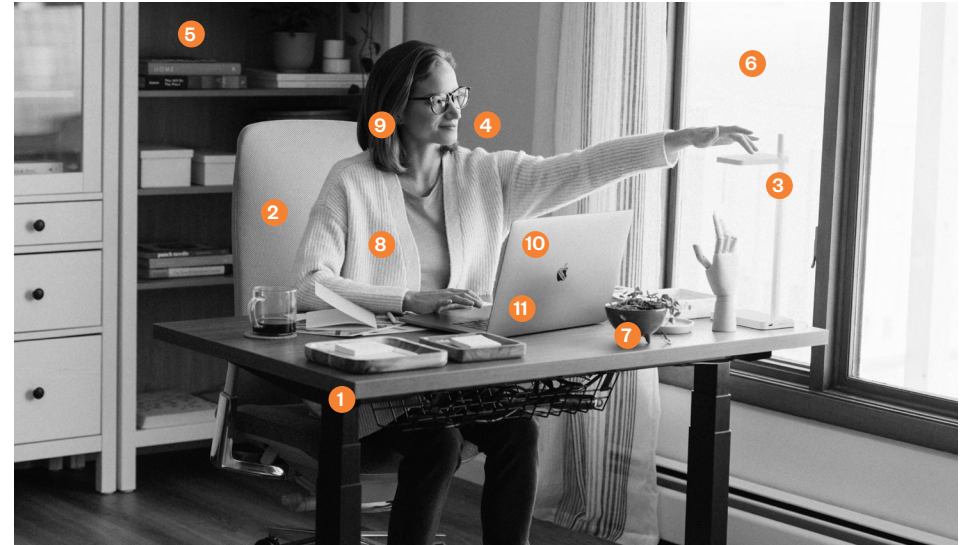


Design Applications

On-Site



Remote



Ambient Qualities

- 1 Air quality
- 2 Access to daylight
- 3 Natural elements
- 4 Thermal comfort
- 5 Freedom from noise



Legibility

- 6 Visual access to others
- 7 Ease of navigation
- 8 Architectural differentiation



Culture

- 9 Social support
- 10 Autonomy in work



User Control

- 1 Adjustable surface
- 2 Adjustable chair
- 3 Task lighting
- 4 Speech privacy



Ambient Qualities

- 5 Air quality
- 6 Access to daylight
- 7 Natural elements
- 8 Thermal comfort
- 9 Freedom from noise



Accessibility of Coworkers

- 10 Connection to coworkers
- 11 Duration of interaction

Resources Are the Key to a Resilient Workforce

Creating a resilient workforce means being ready to take on anything that comes your way in the future. It requires removing resource threats and investing in resource gains for your employees—regardless of where they do their work. While no organization can offer unlimited resources, providing a variety of resources based on individuals' needs will help mitigate the stress employees feel in times of change and adverse conditions—keeping them comfortable, healthy, engaged, and performing their best for your organization and your bottom line.



Additional Resources

Haworth white paper
[“Stress and Resilience in the Global Workplace”](#)

[Spark articles](#) on Resilience



Resources

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